

Dear Chairman Powell and Commissioners,
I am so grateful to FPIRG for providing this opportunity to communicate about an issue that is incredibly important to me.

The paragraphs following this one lay out the case admirably and I stand with them. They omit one key point: greater public access--free and available to all candidates-- might go a long way to reducing the influence of money on campaigns. Corporate, PAC, 527 and other large organizations and wealthy individuals unduly influence elections because the cost of media ads is prohibitive. In addition, candidates with good messages and non-mainstream messages receive no meaningful coverage because they can't afford it.

In fact, even the well-funded candidates can't afford the kind of infomercial length chunks of air time which might allow a meaningful and detailed communication on issues. Instead they rely on the famous sound-bite and the manipulated image.

These days we choose our candidates largely as we choose our soft drinks : based on catchy slogans, emotion-laced imagery and the thinnest veneer of actual debate.

As a citizen who wants to be informed about the political and electoral issues that affect my life, I am greatly disappointed by the lack of informative television programming.

Local public affairs programming is virtually non-existent--constituting less than one half of 1% of all local programming. More than half of news broadcasts prior to the 2002 elections did not include a single campaign story. Our democracy is at risk when many Americans don't know basic facts about the candidates or the issues, as was the case in the 2000 elections.

Since broadcasters have clearly failed in their obligation to serve the public interest, the FCC should define meaningful public interest requirements that include local civic and electoral affairs programming. At a minimum, broadcasters should air three hours per week of local civic and electoral affairs programming, with at least two hours devoted to substantive election coverage in the six weeks prior to Election Day.

As the elections approach, a well-functioning democracy demands that citizens have access to a diversity of opinions and voices on the choices confronting us.

Sincerely,

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